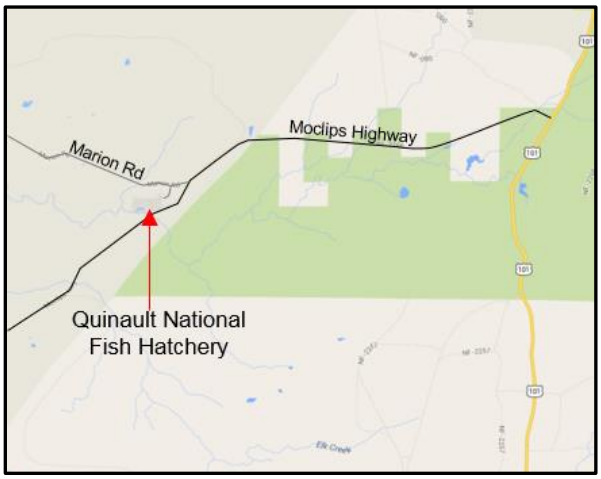
United States Department of the Interior
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington Fish and Wildlife Office
510 Desmond Drive
Lacey, WA 98503-1273

March 3, 2016

Dear Interested Parties:

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service is announcing the availability of a draft environmental assessment (EA) on the possibility of replacing the existing electric fish barrier system at the Quinault National Fish Hatchery (QNFH). The project area is located along Cook Creek at QNFH in Grays Harbor County, Washington. The purpose of the project is to replace the existing fish barrier with a new fish barrier in Cook Creek that operates to maximum efficiency (to the greatest extent practical) for the unique conditions that exist in the Creek. The need for the project is to eliminate the human and animal safety concerns, and operational issues the existing electric fish barrier system poses. The need is also to have a system that reduces the potential of fish disease from entering the QNFH upstream water supply and barrier that incorporates a fish ladder providing the potential for future fish passage. We invite comments from all interested parties on the draft EA.



Vicinity Map

Dates:
To ensure consideration, all comments must be in writing and received from interested parties by April 3, 2016.

Proposed Action Location:
Quinault National Fish Hatchery
3 Sockeye Road
Humptulips, WA 98522

Existing Electric Fish Barrier across Cook Creek

Environmental Assessment Introduction:

USFWS is conducting NEPA analysis in the form of an Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze impacts to the natural and human environment from this project. The EA complies with the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations at 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508 which require an evaluation of potential environmental impacts associated with federal projects and actions.

Public Participation:

The participation of the public is a vital component of the project providing those who are interested in or potentially affected by the proposed project an opportunity to share their comments, ideas, and concerns regarding actions during the public comment stage of the NEPA process. Comments can be submitted via letter or email during the comment period.

Addresses:
To request further information or submit written comments, please use one of the following methods, and note that your information request or comments are in reference to the "Quinault NFH Weir".

- *Internet*: You may view or download copies of the draft EA and their supporting documents on the Internet at: *http://www.fws.gov/Quinaultnfh/QNFHEnvironmentalAssessment.cfm*

- *Email: Yvonne_Dettlaff@fws.gov.* Include ''Quinault NFH Weir'' in the subject line of the message or comments.

- *U.S. Mail:* Yvonne Dettlaff, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington Fish and Wildlife Office, 510 Desmond Drive SE, Suite 102, Lacey, WA 98503

- *In-Person Drop-off, Viewing or Pickup:* Please call 360-753-9582 to make an appointment (necessary for viewing or picking up documents only) during normal business hours at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington Fish and Wildlife Office, 510 Desmond Drive SE, Suite 102, Lacey, WA 98503, or Quinault National Fish Hatchery, 3 Sockeye Road, Humptulips, Washington 98522. Written comments can be dropped off during regular business hours at the above addresses on or before the closing date of the public comment period (see **Dates**).

For Further Information Contact:
Yvonne Dettlaff, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Fisheries Resource Office, telephone: 360-753-9582, or Ben Gilles, Quinault National Fish Hatchery 360-288-2508 (see **Addresses**).

Supplementary Information:
The QNFH was established in 1968 to restore and enhance the depleted salmon and steelhead runs on the Qinault Indian Reservation. A hanging probe electric barrier was originally constructed in 1971 as a preventative measure to ensure that the upstream hatchery water intake was not exposed to fish diseases discovered in the creek. In 2002, the hanging probe fish barrier was replaced with an electric fish barrier consisting of a concrete slab extending across the river, abutments on each bank, and seven electrodes. When energized, the electrodes create an electric field that deters upstream fish passage.

The existing electric fish barrier is not currently functioning as designed and has experienced the following issues:

- Highly variable river conductivity has caused difficulty in setting the electrode current accurately, resulting in failure to prevent upstream fish passage as well as accidental killing of fish.

- Wildlife entering the river during low flows when the electric fish barrier is energized have been killed.
- Individuals have ignored fenced areas/signage and have entered the river near the electric fish barrier, causing safety concerns.
- Large quantities of bed load and debris load in the river have deposited on the electric fish barrier as well as immediately upstream and downstream of the barrier. This debris disables the function of the barrier and the electrodes must be de-energized to clear the barrier of debris.
- The electric fish barrier is not as effective during low flow conditions as desired.

Comments:

You may submit your comments by one of the methods listed in the **Addresses** section. We specifically request information, views, opinions, or suggestions from the public on our proposed Federal action, including identification of any other aspects of the human environment not already identified in the EA pursuant to NEPA regulations at 40 CFR 1506.6.

Public Availability of Comments:

All comments and materials we receive become part of the public record associated with this action. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personally identifiable information in your comments, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personally identifiable information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personally identifiable information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public disclosure in their entirety. Comments and materials we receive, as well as supporting documentation we used in preparing the draft EA, will be available for public inspection by appointment, during normal business hours, at our Washington Fish and Wildlife Office (see **Addresses**).

Next Steps:

After completion of the EA based on consideration of public comments, we will determine whether approval and implementation of the EA warrants a finding of no significant impact or whether an environmental impact statement should be prepared pursuant to NEPA. We will not make the final NEPA and permit decisions until after the end of the 30-day public comment period described in this notice, and we will fully consider all comments we receive during the public comment period.